143

10411

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Washington, D.C. 20520

RS/R FILES
Attention Mrs Mullett
Keep this study together.

SECRET Attachments

June 15, 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. WALT W. ROSTOW
THE WHITE HOUSE

Attached herewith is a chronology and collection of documents pertaining to "Diplomatic Activity Resulting from the Attack on the U.S.S. Liberty".

This report is submitted at the request of Mr. Coyne for Mr. Clifford.

John P. Walsh
Benjamin H. Read
Executive Secretary

Attachments:

Chronology
Collection of Documents

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY J.M. Razi DATE Oct. 20, 1980
RDS☐or XDS☐EXT. DATE
TS AUTH. REASON(S)
ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS ☐
DECLASSIFIED☑ RELEASABLE☑
RELEASE DENIED☐
PA or FOI EXEMPTIONS
MICROFILMED BY RS/R

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY DATE
RDS☐or XDS☐EXT. DATE
TS AUTH.

SECRET Attachments

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BY S/S: CMS

PBL 27 ARAB-ISR
XE DEF 12 YRS

SECRET

Sharp appeal

Diplomatic Activity in Connection with S.S. Liberty Incident

June 8 - A Foreign Liaison Officer of the Israel Defense Forces called in our Navy Attache (ALUSNA) to inform him of the accidental Israeli attack on the Liberty and offer what ALUSNA reported as "abject apologies". Embassy Tel Aviv counseled avoidance of publicity.

June 8 - Secretary Rusk called in Israeli Ambassador Harman to state he had just spoken with the President and was instructed to express in very strong terms U.S. dismay at the incident, and amazement that it had occurred. The Secretary also expressed appreciation for Israel's speed in notifying us, which may have avoided very serious consequences in many respects.

June 8 - In a letter to the President, Foreign Minister Eban said he was "deeply mortified and grieved" by the incident.

June 9 - Prime Minister Eshkol asked Embassy Tel Aviv to inform us that GOI is willing to make retribution and asked that a message be transmitted to the President conveying his "deep condolences."

June 10 - A diplomatic note from the Israeli Embassy in Washington renewed the Israeli Government's "sincere expression of deep regret", expressed condolences and sympathy for the bereaved families, and stated that the Israeli Government is prepared to make amends for the "tragic loss of life and material damage".

June 10 - Under Secretary Katzenbach informed Ambassador Harman of great U.S. concern over the incident for which we can find no satisfactory explanation.

June 10 - Under Secretary Rostow handed Ambassador Harman a strong note of protest, describing the attack as "quite literally incomprehensible", "an act of military recklessness reflecting wanton disregard for human life." It conveyed our official expectation that the Government of Israel will provide compensation and take appropriate disciplinary measures in accordance with international law. It stated the Department of State will, in the near future, present the Government of Israel a full monetary statement of its claim.

June 10 - The Spanish Foreign Ministry expressed concern on behalf of the "highest levels" of the Spanish Government over possible association of Spain in public opinion with operations of U.S. naval craft based in the joint Spanish-U.S. base of Rota. A Madrid Embassy officer, after checking with Rota, informed the Foreign Ministry that this ship is not based in Rota. The official was gratified by the reply.

GROUP 3

SECRET Downgraded at 12 year

Sharp appeal

June 12 - Ambassador Harman handed Under Secretary Rostow a note strongly rejecting the charges set forth in our note of June 10 and renewing the GOI offer to make amends.

June 13 - The Assistant Spokesman of the Israel Defense Forces called ALUSNA in Tel Aviv to report that Chief of Staff Rabin has appointed an official Court of Inquiry to investigate the incident.

June 14 - The Department of Defense announced that a U.S. Navy Court of Inquiry has been convened in Valletta, Malta. It is expected to be in session for approximately one week and to make a comprehensive statement public when its report is completed.

(Reference documents attached.)

The Secretary of State presents his compliments to His Excellency the Ambassador of Israel and has the honor to refer to the Ambassador's Note of June 10, 1967 concerning the attack by Israeli aircraft and torpedo boats on the United States naval vessel U.S.S. Liberty, which was carried out at 1605 and 1625 hours local time, respectively, on June 8, 1967 while the U.S.S. Liberty was engaged in peaceful activities in international waters.

At the time of the attack, the U.S.S. Liberty was flying the American flag and its identification was clearly indicated in large white letters and numerals on its hull. It was broad daylight and the weather conditions were excellent. Experience demonstrates that both the flag and the identification number of the vessel were readily visible from the air. At 1450 hours local time on June 8, 1967, two Israeli aircraft circled the U.S.S. Liberty three times, with the evident purpose of identifying the vessel. Accordingly there is every reason to believe that the U.S.S. Liberty was identified, or at least her nationality determined, by Israeli aircraft approximately one hour before the attack. In these circumstances, the later military attack by Israeli aircraft on the U.S.S. Liberty is quite literally incomprehensible. As a minimum, the attack must be condemned as an act of military recklessness reflecting wanton disregard for human life.

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The subsequent attack by Israeli torpedo boats, substantially after the vessel was or should have been identified by Israeli military forces, manifests the same reckless disregard for human life. The silhouette and donduct of the U.S.S. Liberty readily distinguished it from any vessel that could have been considered as hostile. The U.S.S. Liberty was peacefully engaged, posed no threat whatsoever to the torpedo boats, and obviously carried no armament affording it a combat capability. It could and should have been scrutinized visually at close range before torpedoes were fired.

While the Ambassador of Israel has informed the Secretary of State that "the Government of Israel it prepared to make amends for the tragic loss of life and material damage," the Secretary of State wishes to make clear that the United States Government expects the Government of Israel also to take the disciplinary measures which international law requires in the event of wrongful conduct by the military personnel of a State. He wishes also to make clear that the United States Government expects the Government of Israel to issue instructions necessary to ensure that United States personnel and property will not again be endangered by the wrongful actions of Israeli military personnel.

The United States Government expects that the Government of Israel will provide compensation in accordance with

international law to the extent that it is possible to compensate for the losses subtained in this tragic event. The Department of State will, in the near future, present to the Government of Israel a full monetary statement of its claim.

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RUFPBW/USAFE
RUFPAG/CINCUSAREUR
RUTKRE/CTG SIX ZERO
BT
C O N F I D E N T I A L 0825 JUN 67.
ALUSNA CALLED TO FLO TO RECEIVE REPORT . ISRAELI AIRCRAFT
AND MTB'S ERRONEOUSLY ATTACKED U.S. SHIP AT 08/1200Z,

8 Cys

PAGE 2 RUQMVL 0825 C O N F I D E N T I A L
POSITION 3125N 33-33E. MAYBE NAVY SHIP. IDF HELICOPTERSO
IN RESCUE OPERATIONS. NO OTHER INFO. ISRAELIS SEND ABJECT
APOLOGIES AND REQUEST INFO OF OTHER US SHIPS NEAR
WAR ZONE COASTS. GP-3.
BT

DECLASSIFIED

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OUTGOING TELEGRAM Department of State

INDICATE: ☐ COLLECT
☐ CHARGE TO

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JUN 8 ... 03 PM '67

STATE: 209253

June 8,

1. Secretary called in Israeli Ambassador Harman noon/XXXX. Said he had just spoken with President and was instructed express in very strong terms USG dismay at today's attack on US naval vessel by Israeli naval unit. Said 4 are dead, 53 are injured at latest report. Ship badly listing. Requested Harman convey at once to Prime Minister our real dismay at this very serious matter. Said we consider it amazing that GOI motor torpedo commander could be unable to identify a U.S. naval vessel. We want GOI to issue very explicit instructions in this regard to Israeli naval commanders for we cannot accept attacks on our vessels on high seas.

2. Secretary said we appreciate speed with which GOI informed us this action had been done by one of its craft. This speed of notification in itself may have avoided very serious consequences in many respects.

3. Harman promised inform his government immediately. Noted he had no information yet from GOI on this occurence but had learned of it within the hour during call on Assistant Secretary Battle to whom he had expressed his great sorrow.

Drafted by:	Tel. Ext.	Telegraphic transmission and classification approved by:	
NEA/IAI:WDMolle:pas:6/8/67	4422		NEA - Lucius D. Battle
Clearances:			The Secretary
S/S - Mr. Kelly			S - Mr. Shlaudeman

MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

שר החוץ

June 8, 1967

The Honorable Lyndon B. Johnson
President of the United States

Dear Mr. President:

The few days that I have been here have been spent mostly at the United Nations in an effort to explain ourselves to America and the world. But I have kept in touch with your thinking through Ambassador Goldberg, Mr. Bundy and others.

We have passed through many dangers. But even victory has many problems which we would like to face in frank consultation with the United States. I cannot leave without saying how deeply we have understood your own reactions and policies during this crucial week. Mr. Eshkol and I believe that your

DECLASSIFIED

personal statesmanship is destined to contribute much to the building of a new future for Israel and other nations in the Middle East. This impression has been greatly strengthened by your own forward looking statements and by our contacts with those who speak for you.

I am deeply mortified and grieved by the tragic accident involving the lives and safety of Americans in Middle Eastern waters.

With respectful wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Abba Eban

"Abba Eban

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INCOMING TELEGRAM Department of State

12 released in Shoup case prior to 2/10/77

5 Action

5 Info

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 4028

LIMDIS

PRIME MINISTER ASKS THAT USG BE INFORMED THAT GOI WILLING TO MAKE RETRIBUTION TO THE FAMILIES OF THE VICTIMS OF THE LIBERTY NAVAL INCIDENT AND TO INQUIRE WHETHER SUCH RETRIBUTION WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE. PLEASE ADVISE. BARBOUR
BT

CONFIDENTIAL

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INCOMING TELEGRAM Department of State

10
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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008296

1967 JUN 9 AM 5-14

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE TEL AVIV 4024

1. PRIME MINISTER ESHKOL ASKS THAT THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE BE TRANSMITTED TO THE PRESIDENT:

2. QUOTE DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: I WAS DEEPLY GRIEVED BY THE TRAGIC LOSS OF LIFE ON THE U.S. NAVAL SHIP LIBERTY. PLEASE ACCEPT MY DEEP CONDOLENCES AND CONVEY MY SYMPATHY TO ALL THE BEREAVED FAMILIES.

3. MAY ALL BLOODSHED COME TO AN END AND MAY OUR GOD GRANT US PEACE EVERMORE. SINCERLY, LEVI ESHKOL. UNQUOTE EXEMPT. BARBOUR

NOTE: ADVANCE COPY TO S/S-O 5:22 AM, JUN 9.
PASSED WHITE HOUSE, DOD, CIA, USIA, NSA, COMAC FOR POLAD, CINCSTRIKE, USUN 5:35 AM, JUN 9.

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

Appendix R
Eaves Book

EMBASSY OF ISRAEL
WASHINGTON, D.C.

שגרירות ישראל
וושינגטון

The Ambassador of Israel presents his compliments to the Honorable the Secretary of State and has the honor to inform him that he has been requested by the Government of Israel to renew its sincere expression of deep regret for the tragic accident in which, at the height of hostilities in the area, the USS Liberty was hit by Israeli fire. The Government of Israel deeply regrets this tragic accident.

ACTION
assigned to
NEA

The Ambassador of Israel has been instructed to inform the Honorable the Secretary of State that the Government of Israel is prepared to make amends for the tragic loss of life and material damage.

(2)
b-1267

The Ambassador of Israel expresses once again in the name of the Government of Israel its deep condolences to the Government of the United States and its sympathy to all the bereaved families.

The Ambassador of Israel avails himself of this opportunity to renew to the Honorable the Secretary of State the expression of his highest consideration.

Washington, D.C.
June 10,1967.

POL 27 ISR B-ISR
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OUTGOING TELEGRAM Department of State

INDICATE: ☐ COLLECT ☐ CHARGE TO

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210130

Ship appeal #18

R

JUN 10 6 20 PM '67

ACTION: Amembassy TEL AVIV PRIORITY

STATE 210130

1. Congressional and public opinion incensed over Israeli attack on USS LIBERTY and resultant loss of life.

2. Ambassador Harman handed us note this morning confirming in writing GOI willingness compensate and apologize for accident for which they expressed great regret. We plan give firm note protest and expressing view incident grew out of gross negligence and indicating our expectation disciplinary action will be taken by GOI as well as preventive action taken assure no repetition such incident.

3. In conversation with Under Secretary this morning, Ambassador Harman informed great U.S. concern over incident for which we was can find no satisfactory explanation and our intention submit firm note as indicated above.

4. In conversations in Tel Aviv, suggest you take consistent line informing them in your discretion that note will be forthcoming through GOI Embassy Washington.

5. Text both notes will be sent separately.

GP-3

END RUSK

NEA:LDBattle:lab 6/10/67 Tel.Ext. 4263 Telegraphic transmission and classification approved by The Under Secretary

WHITE HOUSE - Mr. Bromley Smith S/S - Mr. Walsh

SECRET

To be deleted
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INCOMING TELEGRAM Department of State

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MADRID 3471

1. MFA OFFICIAL CALLED EMBASSY TO SAY " HIGHEST LEVELS" GOS VERY CONCERNED OVER PRESS REPORTS ON "USS LIBERTY" INCIDENT FROM US SOURCES STATING VARIOUSLY THAT SHIP DEPARTED ROTA JUNE 2; SHIP ATTACHED TO JOINT SPANISH-US BASE AT ROTA; AND SHIP'S USUAL BASE IS ROTA. MADRID EVENING DAILY EL ALCAZAR CARRIED MOST EXTENSIVE ARTICLE ON INCIDENT IN JUNE 9 ISSUE BYLINED ROSS MARK FROM WASHIGTON.

2. MFA OFFICIAL EXPLAINED THAT GOS PREOCCUPATION STEMMED FROM CONCERN THAT SPAIN WOULD BE ASSOCIATED IN PUBLIC OPINION WITH OPERATIONS ANY US UNIT BASED JOINT USE BASE SPAIN. HE SPECIFICALLY ASKED IF NEWS REPORTS ON THIS SCORE CORRECT. AFTER CHECKING WITH ROTA, EMBOFF TOLD HIM USS LIBERTY NOT BASED ROTA, HAD CALLED THERE FOR ABOUT ONE DAY EARLY JUNE MERELY TO REFUEL AND THAT TO BEST OUR KNOWLEDGE THIS FIRST AND ONLY VISIT OF SHIP TO ROTA. MFA GRATIFIED WITH REPLY AND INTENDS ASK EL ALCAZAR CARRY CORRECTION ATTRIBUTED TO "OFFICIAL SOURCES".

3. REQUEST DEPT CAUTION OFFICIAL USG SPOKESMEN OBSERVE GREATEST CARE IN ANY REFERENCES TO SPAIN DURING CURRENT M. E. CRISIS. WALKER

BT NOTE: PASSED S/S-O AT 10:34 AM 6/10/67
PASSED WHITE HOUSE, USIA AT 11:00 AM 6/10/67

1967 JUN 10 AM 10 25

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CONFIDENTIAL

#20 in Sharp case appendix T in Evron book

The Ambassador of Israel presents his compliments to the Honorable the Secretary of State and has the honor to refer to the Secretary of State's Note of June 10, 1967, concerning the attack by Israeli aircraft and torpedo boats on the United States naval vessel U.S.S. Liberty.

The Government of Israel feels that the statement that "there is every reason to believe that the U.S.S.Liberty was identified, or at least her nationality determined, by Israeli aircraft approximately one hour before the attack" is unfounded.

Nor can the Government of Israel accept the statement that "the attack must be condemned as an act of military recklessness reflecting wanton disregard for human life."

The Government of Israel is of the view that the drawing of such conclusions before a full investigation has been made is unwarranted.

The Government of Israel has already announced the establishment by the Chief-of-Staff of the Israel Defense Forces of a Commission of Enquiry to make a full investigation of all the facts and circumstances. The Government of Israel will make available to the Government of the United States the findings of this investigation, and, for its part, would hope that the Government of the United States will make available to the Government of Israel the findings of its own investigation.

The Government of Israel recalls that as soon as this tragic error occurred it immediately informed the Government of the United States of what had taken place. The Government of Israel immediately assumed responsibility for this error and conveyed its apologies and deep regret for what had occurred and for the grievous loss of life.

Subsequently, as mentioned in the Secretary of State's Note of June 10, 1967, the Government of Israel took the initiative to offer to make amends for the tragic loss of life and material damage. Further, all assistance was offered by the personnel of the Israel Defense Forces to the U.S.S.Liberty, but these personnel were informed by the U.S.S.Liberty that such help was not needed. The area around the U.S.S.Liberty was immediately searched by Israel Defense Forces personnel, by plane and boat, and subsequently search efforts were renewed.

The Government of Israel has standard instructions of the most stringent nature to all its military personnel that the personnel and property of the United States as of all countries not involved in hostilities, shall not be endangered. These instructions have been renewed.

The Government of Israel regrets that it was not given prior information by the Government of the

United States of the presence of a United States vessel in an area which the United Arab Republic had warned neutral vessels to avoid, as it was an area of hostilities. The area was in fact being used by the United Arab Republic for purposes of hostilities against Israel. It would be appreciated if the Government of Israel could be given timely information of the approach by United States vessels to shores where the Israel Defense Forces are in authority.

The Government of Israel renews its offer to make amends and has instructed the Ambassador of Israel to reiterate its profound regret for the consequences of that was admittedly a tragic error.

The Ambassador of Israel avails himself of this opportunity to renew to the Honorable the Secretary of State the assurances of his highest regard.

Washington, D.C.
June 12, 1967.

DECLASSIFIED

INCOMING TELEGRAM *Department of State*

SECRET

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Action

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NEA-2
Info
SS-25
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RUDLHD/CINCUSNAVEUR
RUEHD/JCS
INFO RUEPJS/DIA
RUEHDT/USUN
RUFPEK/CINCEUR/USEUCOM
RUFRN/CTG SIX ZERO PT TWO
RUFPDM/USAFE
RUFPAC/CINCUSAREUR
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BT
S E C R E T 0886 JUN 67.
LCOL BLOCH ASSISTANT IDF SPOKESMAN CALLED ALUSNA AT 131255Z TO REPORT THAT IDF CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL RABIN HAS APPOINTED AN OFFICIAL COURT OF INQUIRY IN THE INCIDENT INVOLVING THE USS LIBERTY. GP-3.

1967 JUN 13 AM 10 10

PASSED S/S--O 6/13/67; 10:26 AM.

SECRET

Defense 7890; Statement from OASD

A U.S. Navy court of inquiry is in session at Valletta, Malta, where the U.S.S. Liberty has arrived. The court, under Read Admiral Isaac C. Kidd, USN, is inquiring into all aspects of the attack. The court is expected to be in session approximately one week. A comprehensive statement will be made public when its completed report is ready.

Many rumors and reports about the attack have been circulating. The Department of Defense has no evidence to support some of these rumors and reports. Others appear to be based on partial evidence. Some appear to be accurate on the basis of present information here, which is incomplete. Until the court has had an opportunity to obtain the full facts, the Department of Defense will have no further comment.

DECLASSIFIED

CLEARANCE: NEA/IAI - Alfred L. Atherton, Jr.

DRAFT: NEA/IAI:GBLambrakis:ef:6/14/67

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